

Driving, Dating, and Disasters by JoMo3

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Summary:

On the first night with his driver's license, Mike decides to take his girlfriend, El, out on a date. Not everything goes as planned.

Driving, Dating, and Disasters

May 1987

“Watch the curb, Mike.”

“I see it, I see it.”

Mike Wheeler turned the corner, hands at 10 and 2, as he turned the car onto Maple Street. Nancy sat in the passenger seat, while seven year old Holly sat in the back of the family’s station wagon.

Mike slowed down as they reached the end of the cul-de-sac, coasting the car into the driveway. He broke with a jerk, causing the Wheeler children to lurch forward a little in their seats.

“Sorry,” he muttered, putting the car in park and cutting the ignition. Hopeful eyes looking at Nancy, he asked, “Well?”

Shrugging, Nancy said, “Well, you didn’t kill us...”

“You stopped too fast,” Holly said from the backseat.

“I know, I’m sorry,” he said, looking at her scowl in the rearview mirror.

Tomorrow, Mike was taking the test he needed in order to get his driver’s license. He had spent the better part of the last three months driving with either his mom or dad (he preferred his mom) and today, on the eve of (hopefully) passing his driving test, Karen had suggested Mike take one more ride. Although he preferred his mom over his dad, who was always barking orders at him (turn! Signal! Slow down, dammit!), it’d been his idea that Nancy ride along with him today. And once Nancy, who was home from Indiana University, agreed, Holly wanted to come along with her siblings. So they’d made the drive from the house on Maple Street down to the school parking lot where he’d be taking his test tomorrow. After practicing parallel parking and a few other last minute things, they’d headed back home.

Their mom had, at first, been slightly offended that Mike had chosen Nancy over her. But the reason Mike had chosen Nancy over Karen was because *he* was already a bundle of nerves and *she* was a bundle of nerves and Nancy, who hadn't really been there over the last few months, was a happy medium.

"You'll be fine, Mike," Nancy assured him. "Just remember to check your mirrors, break plenty of time in advance..."

"Right," he said, nodding.

"But not *too* much in advance."

"Right."

"I'm going inside," Holly said, unbuckling and opening her door.

The two older children watched her go, then Nancy said "Don't be nervous. It's just a test."

"I know, I know," he said. "I just really want to pass."

Lucas had passed his test almost three months ago, as did Max. Dustin had gotten his license two weeks ago, and Will had received his three days ago, after having to take it twice.

"You will," Nancy said, unbuckling and getting out of the car. Mike followed suit. After locking the car, Nancy asked, "What're you going to do to celebrate, when you pass?"

Mike shrugged. "I dunno." He did know, but he was afraid he'd jinx it if he said it.

"Right," Nancy said, grinning. "Well, good luck tomorrow."

He passed with flying colors. As soon as he got home after getting the temporary license, he made a phone call.

That night, the rest of the Party came over and had a mini celebration in the basement, everyone congratulating Mike on (finally) passing his driving test.

When he found a free moment, Mike took Eleven's hand and pulled her upstairs.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I made a reservation," he told her.

"A what?" Although years had passed, there were still some words that tripped El up.

"Sorry. I got us a table at a restaurant. For tomorrow? I wanted to go out to eat, somewhere nice, to, you know...celebrate."

"I thought we are celebrating."

"We are, but...just you and me. A date."

She raised her eyebrows at that, a smile coming to her lips. They had been boyfriend and girlfriend almost two years now, but she still didn't always pick up on Mike's subtle hints.

"Okay," she said, swinging the arm that held his hand. "Where at?"

"Mario's," he said, proud of himself.

She nodded. "Do I need a dress?"

"Well, yeah," he said.

"And you're going to dress up, too?"

He nodded, saying "I guess I'm gonna have to."

She squealed in excitement. "It feels like a grown up date."

"Well, yeah, that's the point," he said.

The next morning, he worked it out with his mom that he would get the family's station wagon at 5:30 to drive he and El on their date. The only problem was, at 5:35 his mom was still out with it.

Mike sat at the table, his leg bobbing up and down, nervously watching the door while in his mind he went back and forth on whether he should call El or the restaurant to say he might be late. The reservation was at six. *Where was she?*

While he kept trying to make a decision Holly came into the room and opened up the refrigerator, giving her big brother a glance.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Mom's not back yet," he said, glancing at his watch.

Holly shrugged. "She went to the store. She's always gone a long time."

That was true. Karen Wheeler could turn grocery shopping into a marathon event sometimes. Still, he'd asked and re-asked about borrowing her car over the past day, and he thought she'd be back by now. *Why did she have to go shopping today of all days*, he thought.

When his watch read 5:45 he got up to go call El. Just as he picked up the receiver, however, the door to the garage opened and Karen Wheeler made her way in, clutching a full bag of groceries. Seeing her son's face, she said "I know, I know. There was a long line. There's two other bags in the car, bring them in for me before you go."

Mike hung up the phone, and briskly walked to the car, grabbing both bags. Careful not to drop them, he brought them into the house where his mom and Holly were unloading the first bag.

"Keys?" he asked.

"In my purse," his mom told him. "Have fun."

He grabbed them, and he was out.

Mike had never driven so fast in his life, and was glad he didn't spot any police cruisers on his way to the Hopper home.

Once arriving, he scrambled out of his seatbelt and made his way up to the house. Hopper and Eleven now lived in a two bedroom ranch house in north Hawkins, not too far away from the police chief's former trailer home.

Mike knocked on the door, hoping that El was ready, and was pleasantly surprised when she opened the door. Not only was she ready, but she looked gorgeous; the dark purple dress she wore looked amazing on her.

"Uh...hey," he said, trying (and failing) to not ogle her.

"Hey," she said, slightly blushing at his gaze. "Are you ready?"

"Yeah, are you?"

She nodded, and walked out into the evening, turning and locking the door behind her. "Hopper's still at work," she explained. "But I told him we'd be back by ten. Is that enough time?"

"Yeah, that should be good," Mike said.

"Okay," she said, turning around and smiling. Leaning in, they kissed, then he took her hand and led her to the car.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said, opening her door for her. After she climbed in and he'd shut the door, he quickly walked to the other side and got into the driver's seat. "My mom took *forever* getting back from the store, and my dad's out golfing with his work friends..."

"It's alright," she said sweetly.

"No, it's not. I wanted tonight to be perfect," he said, starting up the car. "And I don't know if we're going to make the reservation."

"It doesn't matter," she said as he backed out of the driveway.

"What do you mean?"

She shrugged. "We're together on your first night with a driver's license. That's perfect enough."

He could feel himself blush all the way down to his toes as he smiled at her. Leaning over, he kissed her once more before he headed downtown.

The reservation was at six, and try as he might, Mike couldn't get to the restaurant on time. By the time the two arrived, it was 6:15.

Going inside, Mike quickly walked to the maitre'd and said, "Wheeler? Six o'clock?"

"Wheeler," the man said, looking over the list of reservations. Frowning, he looked up, saying "I'm sorry, we had to give up your table."

"But we aren't *that* late," El said.

"We don't hold a table for more than ten minutes," the man said. "My apologies. Perhaps you could've called?"

Mike huffed in disappointment. "Okay, then, we'll take a table."

Still frowning, the maitre'd said "Currently we're all booked up. But you're welcome to wait."

"How long will it be?" El asked.

Shrugging, the man answered, "Maybe an hour?"

Mike rolled his eyes. "Okay. We'll wait."

The two sat down, El holding Mike's hand in an attempt to calm him down.

"I'm sorry, El," he finally said after a few moments.

"It's okay," she said softly.

"I just wanted tonight to be perfect."

"Yeah, you said that," she said with a smile.

Sighing, he leaned against the back of the cushioned chair they sat in. Gazing at her, he smiled, saying, "You look beautiful, by the way."

She ducked her head, a recurring habit of hers that he found adorable, before she met his eyes. "Thank you. You look handsome."

He grinned. "My hair's all messy."

"I like it messy," she said, running a hand through his hair. "Pretty."

He smiled, and she rested her head on his shoulder. He wrapped an arm around her as they continued to wait.

One of the things Eleven loved about she and Mike were that they could always find something to talk about. As they waited, the two discussed their plans for the upcoming summer vacation, their final exams, and the possibility of El getting her own driver's license in the fall. When she'd been officially adopted by Hopper, she had chosen November 6, the day the boys found her, as her birthday.

"Hop's been showing me some," she said. "But hopefully this summer I can get in some more practice."

"I don't know, El," Mike said, shaking his head with a smile, "You're a terror behind the wheel."

"Mouth breather," she said, lightly pushing him.

"Wheeler? Table for two?" the maitre'd said.

"Finally," Mike muttered under his breath. Taking El's hand, the two stood up.

It was a nice restaurant, probably the nicest one El had ever been to. The dim lighting and the classical music playing softly in the background furthered the romantic aura. She felt oddly out of place; they were two high school students surrounded by a sea of adults.

They were led to a table near a window, where Mike pulled the seat out for her before he sat himself.

Sitting across from her, he thanked the hostess who'd led them here, then turned to her and smiled. "Sorry we're eating so late."

She shook her head, looking around. "Stop apologizing, Mike. This is nice," she said.

They both picked up a menu, and she noticed Mike's eyes widen once he took a look at its contents.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing," Mike said, grinning. "Just...glad I've been saving up my money."

"I can help," she offered.

"No, I'm okay."

A waiter came and took their drink orders, with both ordering sodas. They continued to look over the menu until finally Mike asked, "Do you know what you want?"

"The salmon," she commented. She liked fish, plus it wasn't *too* expensive. "What about you?"

"My dad said to try the lobster," he said, closing his menu. "I've never had lobster before, but I've always wanted to try it."

She nodded. "So why here?"

"Huh?"

“Why’d you pick Mario’s?”

Shrugging, he said, “It was the nicest place I could think of. And I wanted it to be nice, to be special, for you and me.”

They both blushed, and he fidgeted nervously with his napkin.

“We’ll have time,” she said, “After dinner. Did you want to see a movie or something?”

“There isn’t really anything out,” he said. “Was there something you wanted to see?”

“Not really.”

“Well, I was hoping we could just, maybe drive around or something. Or park somewhere and talk.”

“Right, talk,” she said with a smile.

“I mean it!” he said, chuckling.

She laughed, and he shook his head. “What?” she asked.

“It’s nothing.”

“Mike, *what* ?” she asked, curious.

“You’re gonna think I’m a corny goofball.”

“I already think that,” she said, teasing him. “Tell me.”

“Well, I was just...I was thinking how it’s kind of dark in here, you know? But your, uh...your laugh, and your, uh...your smile, it’s like it lights up the place.”

Color came to her cheeks as she ducked her head in shyness, then looked back at him with a smile.

“See? Corny goofball,” he said.

“It’s not corny,” she said, shaking her head and making her curls bounce. “It’s sweet.” She reached across the table, and put her hand

on his.

Their waiter returned soon after and took their orders. When their food came, they both dug in, having been hungry for the past hour. El declared her salmon was one of the best meals she'd ever had. Mike needed help at first with his lobster, not knowing where to begin. He blushed in embarrassment as the waiter explained how to go about cracking it open and eating it; but once he got the hang of it, the food was delicious. The bill came, and it was more expensive than Mike had thought it'd be, but he'd brought some extra cash just in case.

After paying the bill, the two stepped out into the darkening night. Once they arrived at the car, Mike opened El's door for her before he got in on his side. After starting the car, he glanced at his watch. "We have two more hours," he said, coughing.

Smiling, El said, "We can go have that 'talk' you mentioned." She paused, narrowing her eyes at him as a frown came to her face. "Mike? You okay?"

He'd turned off the car, as his cough continued. " 'm okay," he managed, gasping. "I just..." With one last look at her, his eyes rolled into the back of his head, and he passed out onto the steering wheel.

"Mike!" El yelled, yanking off her seatbelt and reaching across to him. Shaking him, she said his name again, desperate. Still no response.

She opened her door, and waved down the closest person she saw. "Help! My boyfriend...something happened..."

The man she'd stopped jogged over, and took a look at Mike. "He looks like he's barely breathing," the man said. "Hawkins Hospital is right down the road. Wait here, I'll go and call for an ambulance."

When the man ran into the restaurant, El used her powers to lift Mike into the passenger seat. Getting into the driver's seat, she strapped herself in and floored the accelerator, heading towards Hawkins Hospital.

When Mike opened his eyes, the first thing he noticed was the tiled ceiling above his head. And the fact that he was laying down. *Where was he?* Looking around him, it didn't take long for him to realize he was in the hospital. *How did this happen?* he thought.

The last thing he remembered was sitting in the car with El. El...

Speaking of which, he sat up, and tried to say her name, but his throat felt...funny. Clearing it, he tried again. "El?"

The door that led to the hallway was open a bit, and he watched it open wider as a nurse came in. "Well, hello there," she said with a smile.

Shaking the fogginess away, he asked, "What happened?"

She looked at a chart she held. "What happened is that you had an allergic reaction. Good thing your girlfriend got you here in time."

"Where is she?"

"She's right outside, calling your parents. She's been worried sick about you. You've got a good one there, sir."

Mike nodded. "I know."

Giving him a smile, the nurse said, "I'll send her in."

She exited the room, then a moment later he heard quick feet come down the hallway, and then El was standing at the door, a look of relief on her face.

"Mike!" she said in an excited whisper, rushing over and hugging him.

"Hey," he said, hugging her back. "What happened?"

She pulled away, and he felt a pang of guilt as he saw the redness in her eyes. "You had a reaction to the..lobster, they think. Your throat closed up, and you passed out. I drove you here."

He nodded, some of it coming back to him. "I guess I'm not having lobster again, I guess."

She chuckled, wiping at her eyes.

He sighed, and leaned against the pillow. El, still holding his hand, sat next to the bed. "I'm sorry, El. This night has been, like...awful."

She shook her head. "I could've gone without you passing out..." They both chuckled at that, "But tonight wasn't too bad. Plus, we now know not to order lobster again."

He nodded, squeezing her hand. "I love you, El."

Smiling back, she said, "I love you, too."

"What'd my parents say? Are they mad?"

She shook her head, saying, "They're on their way. They're more relieved, than anything else."

"What about Hop, what time is it?" he tried to look at his watch.

"It's only nine something. But no 'talk' today, I guess," she added with a grin.

"I really did mean talking," he said with his own grin. "Maybe next time, I guess."

She leaned over, and they kissed briefly before she sat back down.

"Wait a minute," he said after a moment, "You *drove* me here?"

"Yeah."

“But you don’t have your license...”

“Would you rather I have left you passed out on the steering wheel?”

He frowned. “I guess not. But...” he began, seriously, “How many tickets did you get driving over here?”

Giggling, she shoved him, calling him a mouth breather. “About this next date,” she began.

“No lobsters,” he said. “So, it’s a date?”

She smiled. “It’s a date.”

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading. Comments are appreciated. Next week I'll be starting a new multi-chapter series, hopefully the first chapter will be up Sunday or Monday. For those that may be waiting on Hearts Continued, I haven't forgotten about it, just taking a hiatus.

Again, thanks for reading.